

Peter Dale Scott: Spooks, Planes, and Heroin in Indochina (1972)

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Program Title: Spooks, planes, and heroin : keys to escalation in Indochina / Peter Dale Scott ; interviewed by Nick Egleson.

Author of "The War Conspiracy," discusses the Central Intelligence Agency, and pentagon backed conspiracies to misinform the White House about the Vietnam War and its extension into Cambodia. - RECORDED: 30 June 1972. BROADCAST: WBAI, 3 July 1972.

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Peter Dale Scott who's with me today has just finished writing a book the war conspiracy which is just about to be published on the 15th of this month and it's subtitled the secret road to the second Indochina war and it's an account of many of the intrigues that have led to not only the Vietnam War but other wars and Indochina other parts of that war and he touches on the Korean War and it is a one of the first in-depth studies of many of the connections both inside the government to different government agencies and to business that are involved in the causes of the wars in Laos and and in Vietnam Peter has your view of what the causes of the Vietnam War changed as you've written this book over the last three years well it's certainly broadened and opened out I began by being interested in intelligence agencies and in what I thought was a dangerous centralization of power in that you have not only the power to report on what's happening out there but also through operations the the power actually to generate political actions out there to topple governments through coup d'etat and on occasion to foment guerrilla wars in remote areas like northeastern Laos and so on so that was my focus at the beginning was to look at intelligence operations particularly on the operations side and since then I was very interested in the Tonkin Gulf incident for example strictly the book grew out of a depth in in-depth study of the Tonkin Gulf incident where you had a destroyer on an intelligence mission Lee the Maddox you had 34a operations these South Vietnamese Swift boats which were attacking the islands of North Vietnam at the same time you had unmarked planes flying in air America planes flying in from Laos or Thailand bombed villages in that area of North Vietnam at the same

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that area of North Vietnam at the same time all of this was intelligence and then finally the the importance of the radio intercepts which were used to convince the Washington administration that a second Tonkin Gulf in and had in fact occurred you know that this is quite a dispute as to whether there really was a second Tonkin Gulf incident which was the occasion for the first bombing of North Vietnam and I think senator Fulbright is now concluded there wasn't a second talking Gulf incident and yet you had these radio intercepts from the intelligence personnel which proved that there was a second incident so that was the kind of problem that I was interested in at the beginning but it's such a complex story and I apologize to the reader for the complexity of the story that you find it opening out to involve economic interests the in the remnants of the Guam and Don Chiang kai-shek's sort of there's not so much within Taiwan but the connections he had with or overseas tries Chinese communities throughout Southeast Asia and so I think one of the things that

intrigued me most about the book was the picture of the war conspiracy as at least some of the time a conspiracy by some elements of government against others yes I believe I believe that is the case and the the is it accurate to say do you think that not only are the intelligence activities the trigger but things are so sensitive the content of one radio telegram can determine whether something is an attack or a defensive reaction Thayer's in the talking Gulf Resolution that that intelligence really plays a balanced role that's not quite the right word for it yes and that therefore their contact as you document with air America with with narcotics with the gomen thing are are much more important than the weight of anyone injured corporate LOC might suggest because of the very borderline position that intelligence plays yes I would add to that that I think they're

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would add to that that I think they're particularly important at which you might call critical periods you reach a point where the government is at an impasse and there you have a faction and incidentally you get often have intelligence people in both factions not all intelligence operators are Hawks there but that's not the conclusion of my book but you have an impasse in the government we you know say that the the government of South Vietnam is not working it's maybe about to fall there are some people whose we've got to escalate to reassure the people in Saigon that we're serious you also have some other people and these may include some intelligence people who are saying it's time to cut our losses and and find out somebody to get out of there and it's in these moments of impasse where the government is at loggerheads with itself that the control over information becomes the control over policy how was that operative in the Tonkin Gulf situation well I think it was operative really from the middle of 1963 right through to early 65 in that there was very there was still resistance in Washington to the idea of bombing North Vietnam particularly the idea of bombing North Vietnam without any visible provocation in particularly of course in an election year that was Johnson was all set to run as the peace candidate in 1964 so it's understandable that all kinds of people were reluctant to bomb North Vietnam at that time and I think that the administration was pushed into bombing North Vietnam by the what are the soil of information before and also the control of information after the alleged what are the forces that that did that and how did they operate well my what I'm trying to do in the book is not so much to identify the criminal as to demonstrate the existence of the crime but there are many people who will believe that the Tonkin Gulf thing was a mess that it was confused that it was they'll even concede that there was no second Tonkin Gulf incident

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there was no second Tonkin Gulf incident but they'll there's a whole book written this way that suggests it was an unfortunate accident and proves the difficulty of controlling the massive Pentagon and I suggest suggesting that it was no accident but you're asking me to identify who the man oh wow oh I didn't mean it in that sense I was thinking of for instance you argue in the in the book that two of the cables which were crucial cables were in fact not relevant to the second Gulf of Tonkin incident they were in some way held over from the first is that that's true well that's not my discovery that's from a very useful book by Anthony Austin call the president war and he I think shows pretty conclusively in that book that the intercepts that were used to force the government to retaliate to the second talking golf incident were in fact they they they were in a sense true except that they were information not about the second incident on August 4th but about the first incident on August 2nd and to which it had already been decided not to have a retaliatory right yes actually no it is not and that these well I would die if you're at you know we're asking who done it so to speak I am very interested that radio intercept information a special kind of intercept activity was the responsibility of the Army Security Agency in South Vietnam we know that from the Pentagon Papers and when when we see that radio intercepts played a vital and very dubious role not only in the Tonkin Gulf incidents but also in other episodes the Cambodia invasion for example in 1970 you had another of these impasses over Cambodia and there were people arguing including some intelligence people arguing very strongly that there was no need for the United States to go into Cambodia and in fact the issue was where where the whole

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fact the issue was where where the whole sort of Viet Cong apparatus had its headquarters in me and the army was claiming that there was a concrete Bastion sort of Pentagon building for the other side in Cambodia and that some of the civilians were arguing that there was no such thing that that just was a radical misunderstanding of how the NLF operates and I believe the civilians were right in this and the New York Times actually printed a map in April 1970 proving that whatever headquarters there was was not in Cambodia but was in South Vietnam and those people were over this is what I call an intelligence battle where you have intelligence operators each trying to influence policy by presenting their version of effects and the civilians were overruled by the hard evidence that came from the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the form of radio intercepts that prove that there was this kind of fortress somewhere in Cambodian of course the American troops where Dinh went right to where the the army claimed the fortress was and it turned out not to exist so once again you had the hard evidence in the form of intercept but but no current no no correlative to it in reality in in the situations like the Tonkin Gulf thing what what's the interest of whoever is is on the side of provocation in that day in that case seems to me you suggest that that has to do a lot with Laos say at the time of Tonkin oh yes and and also with the the long-standing interest of air America and the CIA and Laos could can you explain that more but it's hard it's very hard to do that in terms of one single incident but in terms of the whole of 1964 it was it served the interests of many different factions not all of them American we must remember for example that the Guam and Don was still thinking and still publicly talking about invading mainland China in fact the Kuomintang said I

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China in fact the Kuomintang said I think rid that 19's free they said for some years in 1963 three would be the crucial year and we might mention about the Tonkin Gulf incidents for example that there were nationalists Chinese on those little patrol boats that I was talking about there may have been more Chinese than Vietnamese for all I know that it may well have been Chinese pilots that flew the air America planes that bombed the villages it may even have been I here I'm only speculating the other two things are more corroborate more corroborated but it may be that the Americans were using Chinese personnel to translate from Vietnamese for them because there was a great shortage of experts in the Vietnamese languages for the radio intercepts so that they had a stake there obviously I have to remember this the the powerful financial influences in Vientiane Laos for example are mostly Chinese that that the the Asian capitalist population of Saigon is mostly Chinese and so on in the district and something like this is true also in Bangkok and Singapore does the CIA have getting involved with I mean what's there what's the route well we go back to the 50s when America you know that the McCarthy era and America had accommodated to the loss of mainland China but this produced among liberals almost more than among conservatives the the determination to make a stand in Southeast Asia on the mainland and that meant unfortunately working with very reactionary elements Lee the only sort of visible opposition at that time that they could work with was the status quo which was quite corrupt which was thoroughly sort of intermingled with opium in that area the French had relied on the sort of de facto power networks which were set up by the narcotics trade in opium and the the CIA inherited this

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in opium and the the CIA inherited this and took it over and and I argue in my chapter on heroin not only took it over but actually helped build it up that the the source of opium from mainland China had been cut off by the the Communists you had a worldwide opium Network reaching to America reaching to Chinatown Tong's here right here in America secret societies but the the the opium had been cut off and this was of course crisis to the opium industry and the the the CIA allowed its resources to be used via its airline its quote private airline in in Southeast Asia we call it Air America today it was called civil air transport in those days it's the the its general Chennault airline that he set up after world war ii they allowed that airline which had with 60% controlled by the nationalist Chinese and was based in Taiwan and they allowed it to fly in supplies and even cash CIA cash to the opium growers and traders the the so-called woman dying remnants in

northern Thailand and Burma what did the CIA get out of it well it out of it a network which which reached through the whole of Southeast Asia it it got out of it particularly the early fifties reinforcements for the elements in Malaya that were putting down the insurrection there because these were mostly so-called triads or secret societies Chinese overseas Chinese with links to the Guam and on who were actually hired as private armies by the mine owners and in Malaya to put down the insurrection there and the British started off by trying to stamp out narcotics in Malaya but they found that this meant crushing the secret societies and is a very scholarly book points out this created a vacuum which the Communists moved into so the British learnt that they had to hold off from this and meanwhile the the CIA indirectly but I think quite consciously

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indirectly but I think quite consciously we're allowing their resources to be used to build it up and have to remember that opium was reaching this country in the form of heroin so that they're essentially they were rather callously trading an increase in heroin youth throughout the world for right-wing political support were there rollback strategy in Southeast Asia I mean is that a containment or role I think some of them work as robots there's a more right-wing picture of the CIA then I certainly have in general I think of them well I really don't want I think that it's very easy to to oversimplify what I'm saying about the CIA there I think there were yes particularly in the Far East they a lot of them were right-wing and set up links with the extreme right-wing particularly in the form of a of a woman dung apparatus which incident I think also had links to the right-wing Galen apparatus in Germany which the the CIA also worked with however the CIA also contained liberals and we must remember that some of those OSS veterans you know had worked with Ho Chi Minh and so on and particularly when when Lansdale went out to Indochina for example in 1955 I'm just trying to be fair here he did one of the first things he did was try to crush the the the opium Network incheol on the Chinese suburb of Saigon which the French intelligence had used as a kind of control mechanism for for Indochina and the Lansdale won the battle in 1955 but I think he lost the war because it three or four years later it was necessary for the GM regime to restore its links with that network in order to survive and that's what I it is said I'm making you know unprovable charges here but it frequently it has been claimed that madam knew was involved in that that madam key was involved in that and and most and many top-level people in the present Saigon administration in

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the present Saigon administration in general cameras brother do you think that that right-wing element in the CIA or that with ties to the going gang into narcotics traffic continues today to operator we're talking about a period 64 at Tonkin which is now seven years ago eight years ago it's it's hard for me to analyze it that way because I just don't have the evidence but what I would say is that certain devices which were perfected over the years for generating incidents for generating cooze for generating a kind of crisis to which the American government had to respond because the sort of intelligence personnel had deliberately made a mess that then the military had to come in and and deal with those devices are still practiced and I suppose I'll give you two very recent instances both relate to my book well the first one would be Cambodia you remember there was a coup in Cambodia which preceded the invasion and many people said what madness this coup was because the only sort of possible stable government there was which was that of Prince Norodom C&O could now been overthrown and then the more right-wing Yellen was right no no and some knocked Tang who is now the premier and who is the man with the long distinct stew the CIA in that area and a man whose efforts to overthrow and siano could been subsidized by the CIA for four years and this new sort of very weak government went right out and sort of attacked the the troops of the NLF that had taken refuge in longley eastern border of cambodian people said what madness how insane because they can't possibly win against those people but of course it wasn't madness it wasn't insane it was a way of generating a crisis which would force the Americans to intervene to to

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force the Americans to intervene to to back them up and this has been tried so many times and has worked so many times that it was perfectly rational for the Cambodians to expect that it would work in the case of Cambodia in 1970 and then most recently there's been this talk about general Lavelle who was flying these unauthorized attacks against North Vietnam which were then quite falsely called protective reaction raids and just that was I think was just last week Jack Anderson ran a column in which he said it's not the first time this has happened that something very like this he first of all points out that it was general Lavelle was doing this in the context of Kissinger's efforts to make some kind of secret deal with the Vietnamese in Paris and that it was just like in 1967 when Obereck and Markovic who were two friends of Kissinger were on a secret mission to Vietnam and the Joint Chiefs or their or think pack dumped a sort of record number of bombs all around Hanoi while they were doing this I know that meant even saving up all their authorizations to bomb didn't write I could use them all at once and I have a whole chapter about this in my book of course I didn't know about the general Lavelle thing I wrote it before the general Lovell episode in fact but precisely what Jack Anderson is talking about in 1967 I have a whole chapter about how we not only bombed Hanoi but actually bombed Soviet ships in Haiphong Harbor bombed Chinese ships and that these attacks on Soviet and Chinese shipping occurred regularly at times when there were secret peaceful negotiations going on with the ladies do they fail to occur when there weren't secret negotiations just fantastic that even when you have a poll Peace Initiative that the Polish ship gets attacked I mean that's the degree

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gets attacked I mean that's the degree of refinement to which this really hideous kind of thing was going on I can't prove that that was the intention but I can draw a little chart and I have which is two pages long of attacks on shipping which correlate very closely with the peace initiatives at the time do can I say one more word about that and that is that although we didn't know it at the time there were periods when Haiphong Harbor was off-limits because of the sensitive peace negotiations and you find that the the greatest number of attacks on shipping are precisely at times when Hanoi and Haiphong have being put secretly off limits it seems to me we're talking about a series not just one more conspiracy in the narrow sense but many different ones I mean we've just talked of two of one of elements of the CIA conspiring against all it a syndrome syndrome right yes wiring against the military here we're talking about the Joint Chiefs of Staff perhaps conspiring against Henry Kissinger I mean or yes I think but I think remember it's not quite that disparate because I think the intention of a lot of the right CIA people was precisely to elevate out of a covert operation into a military operation so that their interests and those of the military did Cowen's well they may have coincided I just meant that they were not necessarily in communication with each other it's a release if they were you weren't you weren't talking about I can't see that I can only see the outward manifestations well it seems to me I have a in terms of the present situation is it there's obviously the struggle continuing is general de Velde actions indicate between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the withdrawal policy considerations a and and Nixon seems more to be connected to kiss dear I mean it would heart be hardest I think in an election year the presidents are usually on the side of the negotiators yes and who do you think is winning that

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yes and who do you think is winning that war of nerves well there's a short-term answer to that and a long-term answer to that I think in the the long term we have never yet seen a successful de-escalation or of this war and I fear Eve in the long term even if Aetna mosz ation were to work I think the whole way in which was set out by Nixon the way that he always specified that withdrawal of the troops did not apply to the troops on the aircraft carriers and the troops in Thailand and so on it does not mean withdrawal from the war it just means that he wants to win or at least to maintain US presence by other means I think it is see I start Corey I go all the way back to 1959 and I talk about what were then not military operations but essentially in covert intelligence activities and I think it's very important to go that far back and look at those because that is a situation where you did not have the military in the scene you only had the intelligence plus Air America in the scene and that is possibly what we might have in 73-74 if Nixon wins the election and I think it will it will represent a continuation of the American presence by other means I'm not at all sanguine about the ability to

get the United States out of Vietnam and I want to remind everyone that it means more than getting the troops out it means more than getting the planes out it means that we're no longer going to try and arrange cooze topple governments and and and push people around the way we have been doing for over 20 years it's the situation that comes to my mind is the situation of the French and Algeria where the fight between the gaulle and the right-wing military was very severe and that and now i'm startled all together unrelated may i say all right well maybe

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unrelated may i say all right well maybe you should say some more about that in a second but but at times it threatened the the stability of the central government in France itself yes and the jockeying from the gauls point of view in order to disengage from algeria was was very extreme now I don't mean to imply that therefore I think Nixon is the de Gaulle I obviously I don't think that but it seems to me that there is evidence of a great deal of jockeying in order simply to affect the withdrawal of ground troops right and my temptation knowing much less than you do about this is to see for instance the promotion of Abrams to the Joint Chiefs of Staff as an attempt by Nixon to solidify the troop withdrawal position inside the Joint Chiefs who have been I think on the Lavelle side of this controversy do you think that's a reason I think that I know the very sensible word you've put in at this point and of course no analogy is perfect in history but I think the compasses just knew raised about comparing the the predicament of Nixon to the predicament of Duvall is is very apt one and and one which should indeed be thought about and of course the the trouble would to go ahead with his generals and with the secret army which emerged ultimately we should think about all of that it's it's not easy I think for most Americans to think of their domestic history in terms of such you know it we've become in accustomed over the last decade to think of very insidious things going on in in Indochina I think most of us still have this feeling it can't happen here you know I mean because what we see when we look around us is it's much more attractive than that from unless we're seemingly stable right yes but I'm I'm not going to give you a sort of three-minute summary of what's going to happen to this country in the next year but I do think that there are very powerful forces opposed to even what Nixon proposes to do which you might say is a rather conservative kind of withdrawal program and I think you're

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withdrawal program and I think you're absolutely right when Kissinger is running into a lot of trouble I think Nixon in 72 at any rate will be in a position rather like Johnson in 64 where he was not in a hurry to to do hawk-like things and yet there were people who for that very reason started chivvying and pushing him harder than usual that is usually the case the difference you're suggesting or one of the principal differences between Nixon and the Gaulle is that the gauls long-range intent was a very low-profile analogy area and that Nixon's intent here his is it you would argue is really to shift the the mechanism of conduct in the war in Southeast Asia is that no that's that living this to a whole aspect of the book that we haven't even talked about which is economic interests I think the goals long-term objective object was by a political change of policy to maintain French economic links with the natural resources particularly the natural gas of Algeria which we have just purchased in their very large quantities right yes where we don't have time for all of that okay but I think that American intelligence operations including and Nixon's Vietnamization proposals in Nixon Doctrine and so on also have to do with US interest in long-term relationship to the resources of Indochina which increasingly it appears despite many protestations to the contrary it appears that the oil industry suspect that it is a considerable amount of oil in the offshore areas of Indochina and that there's one place where there that I think they're just about ready to drill which is in a offshore area which is claimed by South Vietnam but which is embarrassingly close to Cambodia in fact that weren't for the the odd kinks in the in the the boundary you would think

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the in the the boundary you would think that they were a part of Cambodian waters rather than Vietnamese waters and that there some people have claimed that the resources in that South China Sea along the Sunda shelf may thunder it it may sometime be an area which will be comparable to the Persian Gulf it may in fact be one of the largest untapped oil reserves areas of the world and we know that in a time of increasing talk about you know the the need for long-term planning for for energy resources that this this sort of area can be extremely important I think that the that one can make a military case for having gone into Cambodia in 1970 but one can also make a case that one wanted at least to secure those offshore waters for the the further for the development of the oil and I think it's quite easy to show that to the people who had among if you look starting at the start looking at the the Vietnam Lobby in this country the peat the private interests that have been pushing for the same sort of thing that these intelligence agents have been pushing for we find the the oil lobby we find a man called William Henderson in 1963 for example edits the book and write a chapter in which he says in effect we have to go beyond these covert operations that we've been using in the past we have to intervene we've always been intervening he says but we have to intervene more he was right there yes but we must intervene more frankly and directly than we have been intervening before this was a message to the Kennedy administration and so I think most people know that they're very strong there's a very high interface between the oil industry and intelligence operations overseas and I think that oil interests have been clearly I think being interested in Indochina at least

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being interested in Indochina at least since about 1963 and in fact I haven't checked this out yet but I noticed that among the American Friends of Vietnam at a conference in 1958 an organization called offshore services was represented way back then and there are a lot of small not proven but but sort of hints that that possibility of offshore oil was people in the inside were aware of it back before the second Vietnam war I ever really began and that they like the Pan Am officials who you talk about although in the book and see it we were involved in the war in this hair-trigger relationship through intelligence yeah able to determine what right what if larger forces did okay well we're out of time and I'm sorry about that it's been very interesting talking to you I've been talking to Peter Dale Scott about his book the war conspiracy the secret road - the second Indochina war which is about to be published by bobbs-merrill it's been a pleasure and I hope you're going to keep up this kind of research in the future thanks very much

END